

2007 Fact Sheet

Teens at Work Project
Occupational Health Surveillance Program
Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Non-Fatal Work-Related Injuries to Massachusetts Teens, 2000-2004 AN OVERVIEW

Background: Work is part of everyday life for many teens throughout the United States. Surveys of students indicate that more than 80% of teens have held a job at some point during high school¹. According to government workforce statistics, Massachusetts teens are more likely to work than youths in the country as a whole. Between 2000 and 2004, an average of 36% of Massachusetts' 16- and 17-year-olds, and 14% of 15-year-olds, were employed at any given point compared to 30% of 16- and 17-year-olds and 10% of 15-year-olds nationwide²; these statistics do not include the many 14-year-olds who also work. One national study found that 8% of 14-year-olds in the United States were employed during the school months³. In Massachusetts, teens most commonly work in part-time, short-term jobs, largely in the retail trade and service industries such as restaurants, grocery and department stores, and movie theaters¹.

While work can have many benefits for youth, it can also pose health and safety risks. Nationwide, from 2000-2005, 312 workers less than age 18 were fatally injured at work—an average of 52 deaths per year⁴. In addition, an estimated 160,000 teens in the United States sustain non-fatal work-related injuries and illnesses each year⁵. Studies have also shown that teens have a higher occupational injury rate per hour worked than adults¹. Occupational injuries are preventable. Knowing where and how teens are injured at work is essential to develop effective approaches to prevention, which is why the Massachusetts Department of Public Health created the *Teens at Work: Injury Surveillance and Prevention Project*. Funded by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, the project is the only one of its kind in the United States.

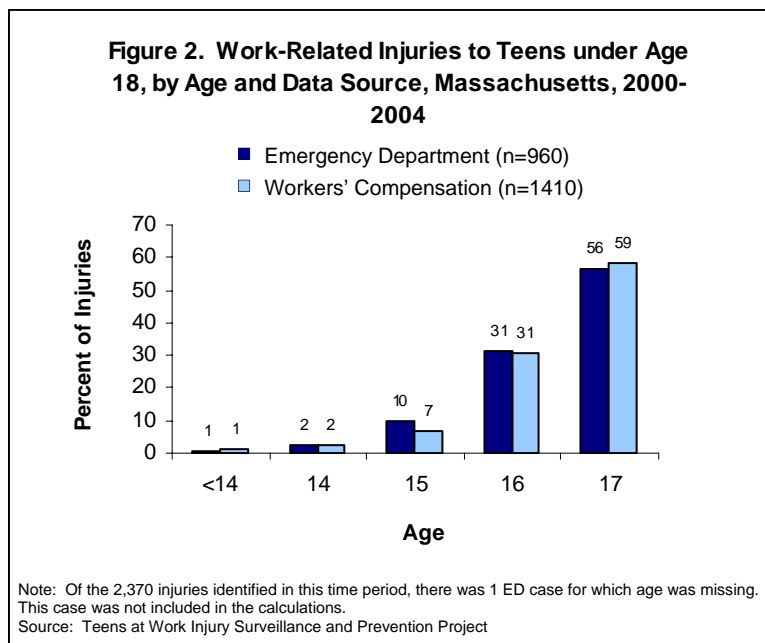
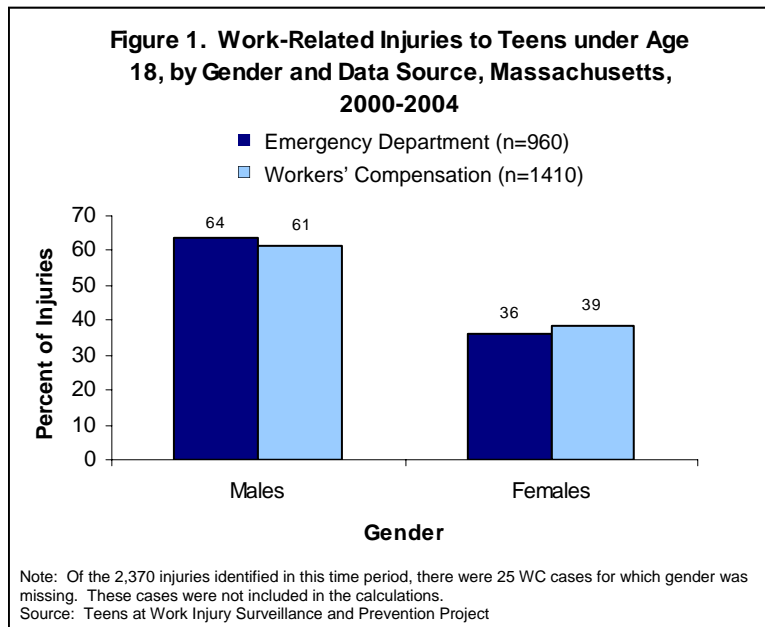
About the *Teens at Work Project*: The Massachusetts Department of Public Health's (MDPH) *Teens at Work: Injury Surveillance and Prevention Project* (TAW) collects data about work-related injuries to teens less than 18-years-old. This information is used to aid in planning prevention activities across Massachusetts. Since 1992, Massachusetts public health code has mandated that health care providers and hospitals report work-related injuries to persons less than 18-years-old to MDPH. Workers' compensation records are also used to identify injuries to young workers. The injuries identified through workers' compensation records are limited to injuries resulting in five or more lost workdays, and only a sample of hospital emergency departments (9 out of 84) consistently report injuries to the surveillance system. Consequently, the actual number of work-related injuries to teens requiring medical treatment is believed to be much higher than the number of injuries identified by the surveillance system. Nevertheless, TAW findings provide important information about the occupations, industries, and workplaces in which young workers are injured.

The TAW Project also conducts follow-up interviews with injured teens to obtain additional information about their injuries and work experiences. In some cases, TAW staff conduct research-oriented worksite investigations to learn more about the work environment and circumstances under which the injuries occurred. This information is used to promote efforts to prevent similar injuries in the future. The TAW Project also refers cases to other government agencies for follow-up when appropriate. This fact sheet provides a summary of young worker injuries that occurred in 2000-2004 and were reported to MDPH.

Findings: Between January 2000 and December 2004, 2,370 work-related injuries to Massachusetts teens were reported to MDPH—an average of 474 injuries per year. Over half of the injuries (59%) were identified through workers' compensation (WC) records and 41% were identified through hospital emergency department (ED) reports.

Injuries by Gender, Age & Race

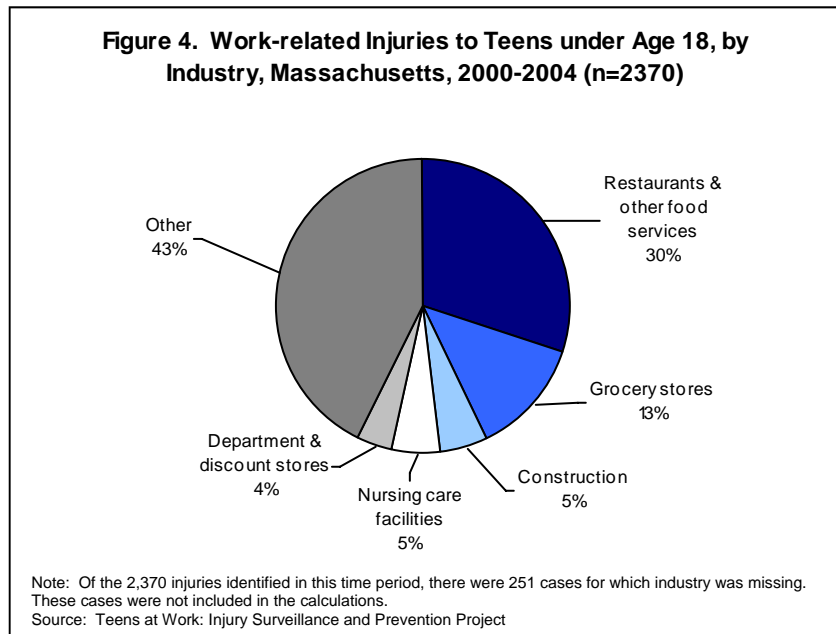
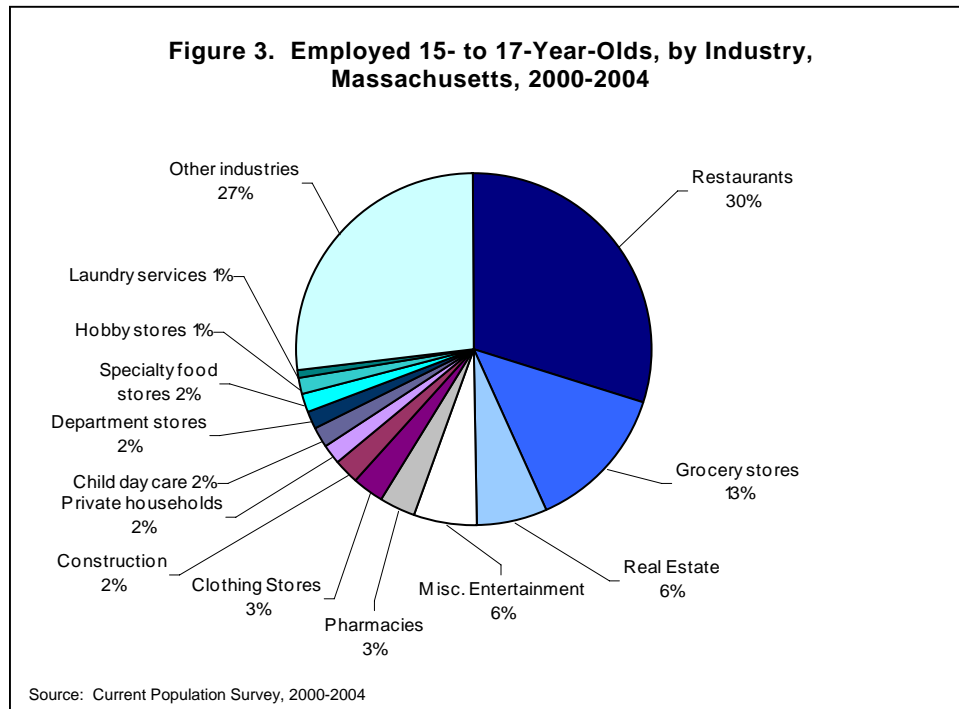
More males than females were injured (Figure 1) and, as age increased, so too did the number of injuries (Figure 2). Information about the race of the injured teen was available for most of the injuries reported by EDs—88% of these cases were White. Of the 862 ED cases for which ethnicity was reported, 8% were Hispanic. (*Note:* The workers' compensation records do not include information on race or ethnicity.)



Injuries by Industry

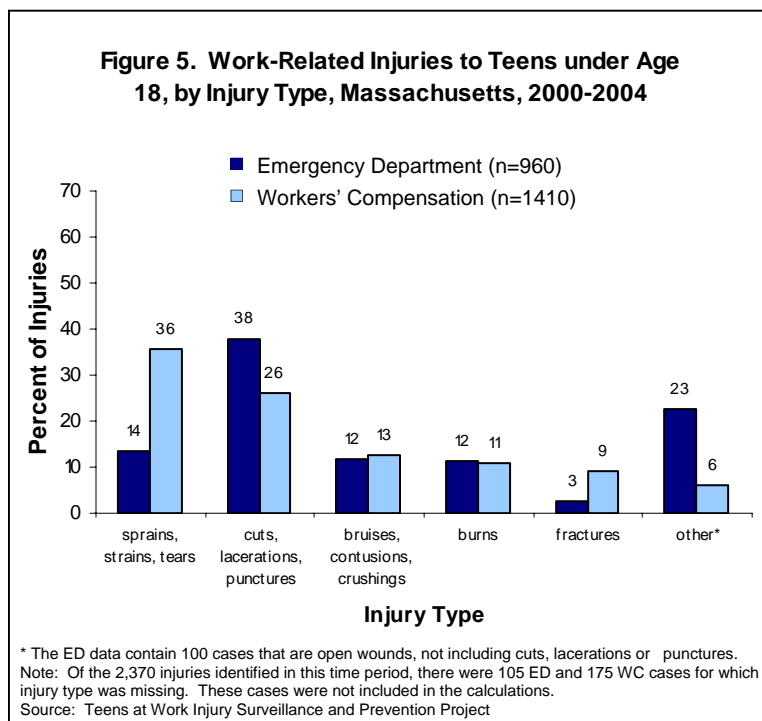
More Massachusetts youth work in food services (i.e., restaurants, fast food places, snack bars) than in any other single industry (Figure 3). Restaurants and other food services were also the most common type of workplace in which youth were injured, accounting for 30% of all injuries (Figure 4). Five industries accounted for over half of the injuries to young workers.

Surveillance updates on specific industries are available at www.mass.gov/dph/teensatwork.



Injuries by Type

Not surprisingly, the types of injuries identified differed by data source (Figure 5). Among injuries reported by EDs, the most common injury was “cut, laceration, puncture”. Among injuries identified through workers’ compensation records, the most common injury was “sprain, strain, tear.” Thirty-six percent of all strains, sprains and tears reported involved the back.



If you have any questions about the information presented here, or would like to learn more about the *Teens at Work Project*, contact Project Coordinator, Beatriz Pazos Vautin at 617-624-5677.

References

- (1) National Research Council. Institute of Medicine. (1998). Protecting youth at work: Health, safety and development of working children and adolescents in the United States. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- (2) U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2000-2004). Current Population Survey. Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- (3) U.S. Dept. of Labor. (2000). Report on the Youth Labor Force. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor.
- (4) U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, correspondence November 30, 2006.
- (5) National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health website <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/youth/> accessed October 13, 2006.

Acknowledgements

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